MICHEL GULPE

EVERIT BOGERT TERHUNE

He appeared perfectly willing to express his views.—Page 32. *Frontispiece.*

MICHEL GULPE

BY
EVERIT BOGERT TERHUNE

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Michel Gulpe

Part One

OW I happened to engage lodging with Madame Valjean I do not know.

Perchance it was on account of the fascinating view of the little provincial town which the house, situated at the head of the steep, narrow street leading through the village to the château, afforded; or the curious old house, with its high pitched roof, its two front win

dows all askew, like the eyes of old Félicien the *portier* at the Cheval Blanc, one bulging out and the other sinking back in its socket, and its huge nail studded door set half-way be tween the enormous beams whose ends were carved with such grotesque figures and faces; or it may have been on account of the kindly red face of Madame Valjean herself, as she stood by my side puffing like the Paris-Calais express from the exertion of escorting me up the narrow, dingy stairs to the little room under the roof

An ancient four-poster bed with a fluted valance and curtains of a sombre plum-colored stuff stood over against the wall between the two dormer windows. A cedar chest, an old but respectable arm-chair with a faded covering, and an emaciated, three-legged table occupied the rest of the room. On the wall hung an imposing portrait of the late Monsieur Valjean *en costume de muscadin*.

That which interested me most, however, was the view from the large dormer window At the foot of the steep high

way lay the little town with its thread-like, tortuous streets, and its gray cathedral, under the sombre shadow of which nestled a cluster of houses of the most diverse styles of architecture Squatty roofs and high-pitched roofs, windows of every shape and size, red tiles and black tiles, chimneys and turrets of all degrees of ugliness, weather worn timbers of nondescript hue, all were there in exquisite variety and disorder. Over towards the château were two little steeples, that seemed to be pointing at the heaven-kissing

cathedral in pert derision, in quite the same way as the baker's boy might point at Monsieur le Curé Ambroise as he passed by on his way to early morning mass.

The view taken in part or as a whole would have sent a thrill of ecstacy through the soul of an antiquarian or an artist. I was neither the one nor the other, but I have a decided affection for old things and peculiar, and the atmosphere of ages agone that hung over the little provincial town was quite to my liking. I pictured to

myself many a happy hour spent in rambling among these old buildings, hundreds of years old, many of them, not to mention the delightful companionship of the quaint characters that go to make up the household of a town such as one finds only in provincial districts of the old world.

"And will monsieur engage the room?" asked Madame Val jean, regarding me anxiously with her little black eyes.

For answer I drew out my wallet and placed a gold coin in her fat palm

"And when Madame has need of more," said I, smiling "she must not be afraid to ask for it."

Then Madame bustled around the room to make ready for her new *pensionnaire*, and I walked back to the Cheval Blanc to pack together my belongings and bribe Félicien to carry them to my new little room under the roof.

The days that followed were inspiriting ones for me. From morning till night I prowled about the old town making friends with

The butcher, the baker,

The candle-stick maker,

and popping upon the mysteries of the little back streets which, tortuous and villainously uneven, were studded with malicious little sharp stones that brought to mind the implements of tor ture so vividly depicted in a highly-colored print that hung up in the rear of Mère Suard's dingy pastry shop. I patronized all the shabby old inns which seemed to glare at one another with open disapproval or con temptuous satisfaction according as a patron entered one or the

other for his morning bock or his evening potion of *vin ordinaire*.

Towards four o'clock of an afternoon the Cheval Blanc would present a scene of remarkable activity in comparison with its usual state of torpor. All the worthies of the town would congregate in front of this highly-esteemed caravansary to await the *diligence* which would soon arrive from Poitiers. Monsieur le docteur Laurien would be there, with his puffy red face and his penny-trumpet voice. Père Gaultier who, notwithstanding

his game leg, would have shuffled three miles to a funeral if he could but get out of range of Mère Gaultier's wagging tongue, would be sitting on the right end of the lower step of the inn, smoking his briar pipe. Phillipe Gahn, the butcher, would be promenading with his awe-inspiring paunch up and down the gritty walk, restlessly awaiting the arrival of some special roasts from the city. And Monsieur le curé Ambroise would be there, asking the men about the vintage, inquiring after the health of

Madame Laurien, and con gratulating Père Gaultier on his good health.

Then the crack of a whip would be heard far up the Rue Royale, and old Félicien would drag himself out of the Cheval Blanc and stand on the stone block in front of the walk, his head high in air, his arms akimbo, and his rusty chest inflated with impor tance, ready to catch the mail-bag as the *diligence* lumbered up in front of where he stood. The greasy windows of the old tavern would be filled with

faces of chambermaids, cooks and scullions peering through to see if there were a new guest and what he might look like.

I found a great deal that was interesting in the grave old cathedral. The world-sim ple villagers regarded with awe this massive creation of human hands, and reverently crossed themselves as they passed within sight of the big, cold windows of the clearstory that frowned unsympathetically on the passer-by, irrespective of his age, sex, or condition. And the

grotesquely-carved gargoyles, that clung to the cathedral like parasites, and grinned derisively at the great, sombre body to which they were fastened, were a source of much annoyance to little Jean Gaultier, who found them just a trifle too high for his disaster-spreading projectiles

At early mass the villagers would string into the cheerless nave of the cathedral, kneel on the damp flags, and pray in silence to the beloved Mary behind the choir, over which sparkled a little circular window filled with curious ornamental

tracery. Madame de Laurien would be conspicuous in front of the reverent multitude, as near the choir as she could get. A very religious woman was Madame de Laurien, especially when she wore her tattooed silk dress, green scarf, and peacock bonnet, which Monsieur le doc teur de Laurien had brought her from Paris. Not far from her would be the massy frame of Madame Gahn, who was obliged to remain kneeling after her matin devotions until the beadle could assist her to her feet. And Mère Gaultier would

be there, too, kneeling near the door, where she could keep one eye on Monsieur le curé Am broise and the other on her young hopeful, Jean, whose only aspirations were to escape through the door into the open air and, finding that impossible, to blow a spit-ball as far as the bald spot on old Félicien's bared head.

One morning, as I was kneel ing unobserved beside a column in the cathedral, I overheard young Jean Gaultier, who was on the other side, setting his wits to work with Sulpice Tau

bert, the baker's boy, to make merry with one Gulpe—Michel Gulpe, I thought they said—against whom they evidently bore some grudge.

"You carry the box round there to-night," whispered Jean to Sulpice, "and I'll arrange the rest of the things."

"But what if he should catch me?" replied Sulpice in a trem ulous voice, "he might change me into a rat."

"More likely he'd change you into a chicken!" replied Jean, scornfully.

"But old Félicien says Michel

Gulpe's shop is filled with devils and that he can do whatever he pleases at night," whispered Sulpice, looking over his left shoulder in terror. "Why don't you go, Jean?"

"Because I must arrange the rest of the affair all alone," said Jean, decidedly. "And besides, you were always a better runner than I, Sulpice."

This compliment—a rare thing from Jean—seemed to pacify Sulpice.

The boys continued talking in an undertone, and were making good progress in their plot

when of a sudden a fearful blast shook the cathedral from end to end. Madame de Laurien seized her bonnet; Madame Gahn nearly lost her balance as she jerked her head around; Mère Gaultier forgot all about the Curé and Jean. Everybody looked round in fear and trembling — everybody except old Félicien, for one of his renowned nasal outbursts had been the cause of all the disturbance. But it was a frightful blast, nevertheless, and I glanced round just in time to see Jean and Sulpice disappear

ing through the door of the cathedral as if they had seen a score of Michel Gulpe's red devils with blue tips to their tails. Needless to say, Jean was the first out. Whatever be came of their plot against Michel Gulpe, I do not know.

"Where is Michel Gulpe's shop?" I asked of Félicien, as we were walking back towards the Cheval Blanc, after mass.

The old *portier* could not have stared at me with greater surprise had I asked him for the loan of a *louis d' or*.

"You'll find him at his

boutique de tabac, Rue Martel," said he, edging away from me as if I, too, had been possessed of devils.

I walked down the Rue Royale to the Rue de la Plaine and then picked my way through to the Rue Martel, a funny old street, as narrow and dingy as a street could be. Not far from the corner I saw a big pipe hanging up over a rickety old door, on which was painted:

MICHEL GULPE

BOUTIQUE DE TABAC.

I pushed open the door and walked in. Michel Gulpe—I

knew it must be he—was standing behind a well-worn counter reading a book by light of the few straggling rays that oozed in through the dirty window panes.

An odd looking man was he, tall and angular, with shaggy gray hair, eyes black and beady, a complexion swarthy, and a careworn expression on his face marking him as a man who had either suffered much or had applied himself too assiduously to some cherished pursuit. On his head was a little black cap.

To the gullible minds of Jean and Sulpice, or to the superstitious folk of the village Michel Gulpe might easily have passed as an uncanny, unnatural creature; but to the sober mind he was merely an eccentric man, and perhaps a trifle unhinged.

I asked for some tobacco, and while Michel was weighing it, I glanced at the book which he had been reading, and which was lying on the counter. It was a philosophical treatise of some distinction. I was surprised to see such a work thumb

worn by a petty tobacconist in the Rue Martel.

"I see that you are a philoso pher, Monsieur Gulpe," said I pointing to the book.

"Not exactly a philosopher, Monsieur," he replied, handing me my package of tobacco, "but a lover of philosophy and the sciences. And you?"

"Merely a dabbler in such things," said I.

"It's far better to be a good dabbler than a poor philoso pher," he replied, shrugging his shoulders. "Most of the peo

ple hereabout are mighty poor philosophers."

I was soon aware that Michel Gulpe was a man of deep learning, but I also perceived that he was decidedly uncommunicative when it came to talking about himself. He appeared perfectly willing to express his views on any scientific or doctrinal subject and presented his views in an interesting and convincing way. Yet he would avoid any question that might be of a personal nature. This evasive air of his served only to augment my thirst for knowledge, how

ever, and when I left the little *boutique de tabac* in the Rue Martel, I congratulated myself on having made the acquaint ance of an interesting character in Michel Gulpe, tobacconist.

PART TWO

Part Two

ICHEL GULPE! exclaimed Madame Valjean, sweeping away the crumbs with her general-utility apron. "You haven't been wasting your time with that shatterpated old fool have you, monsieur?"

"Why, yes." I replied. "I happened into his shop this

morning to buy some tobacco and we got talking together"

"But, monsieur," exclaimed Madame, wiping the beads of perspiration from her glowing face with her apron, "don't you know that Michel Gulpe is — is crazy and bewitched?"

"Crazy and bewitched!" echoed I, looking up in appar ent surprise from the tarte which she had placed on the table be fore me," "Why, Madame, you are judging Michel harshly. I certainly shouldn't call him crazy."

"But he is crazy." said

Madame, emphatically, drying a large platter on her apron, "Everyone hereabout will tell you so. Why, he even thinks that when we die we change into animals! There's Maître Richepin, for instance. He is a large man, you know, and has to eat more than most people to keep the breath within his body. Now, Michel Gulpe says that Maître Richepin is going to turn into a pig when he dies. You may depend upon it that Maître Richepin never patronizes Michel Gulpe for tobacco. Then there's old

Mère Gaultier. She is some what of a scold, to be sure; but who wouldn't be to have an old soft-spot like Michel Gulpe tell everybody that she is going to change into a porcupine? Philippe Gahn, the butcher, will change into a poodle — and Philippe Gahn is as good a man as ever made sausages! If ever a man was loony, mon sieur, it's that Michel Gulpe."

And Madame Valjean gave vent to her emotions by sud denly pouncing upon a couple of inoffensive flies with her apron.

Knowing the peculiarities of French country-folk as I did, I was aware that, inasmuch as most of the villagers looked askance at Michel Gulpe, it would be better for me not to evince too keen an interest in him. Therefore, after lunch, I strolled up and down the little garden-plot in front of the house for some time, in order to allay Madame Valjean's sus picions and to await a favor able opportunity to make my escape unobserved towards the Rue Martel. At last, seeing Madame nowhere in sight, I

walked unconcernedly out of the garden and started down the Rue Royale. As I glanced back, however, I saw Madame Valjean running across to Ma dame Picard, her nearest neigh bor, probably to inform her that monsieur, the new lodger, was all the time in secret com munion with Michel Gulpe. He who nods at the Devil is no better than the Devil him self.

PART THREE

Part Three

NE night, about a month after I had made the acquaintance of Michel Gulpe, I was sitting alone in my little room under the roof, smoking and dreaming upon fair days long gone by, when a fitful gust of wind swooped around a corner of the roof and cast an

army of rain-drops against my dormer window with such an unexpected clatter that I held my breath for a moment expecting to see a horde of night creatures rush in upon me. I looked at my watch. It was nearly eleven o'clock. Not a sound could I hear save the mournful blending of the wind and rain outside, and I knew that most of the villagers were at rest for the night.

Solitude is all very well when the wheels of one's fancy are rapidly at play, and when one can remain oblivious of the

present conditions under which one exists. But when there comes a rude awakening, such as is destined to come sooner or later, then the solitude erst while so pleasant assumes enor mous proportions and the feel ing of oppression that follows is as unpleasant as the previous sensation was pleasant.

I laid down my pipe and walked over to the window. The boards creaked dismally under my feet as I stepped, and I wondered what Madame Val jean would think I was doing out of bed at this unearthly

time of night. She would probably think that, inasmuch as I had wasted so much of my time of late with Michel Gulpe, I was now up to some sort of a deal with the Devil himself.

I peered out of the window into the darkness. It was a good night to be within doors, I assured myself. The wind was blowing heavily from the sea and was dashing the rain in sharp, slanting sheets. At the foot of the hill I could barely discern the dim outline of the little village crouching, as if for protection from the raging

storm, under the upstretched arms of the solemn cathedral. Everything was silent, black, and dismal. I was about to pull together the curtains and return to the companionship of my faithful pipe when a faint flash of light just this side of the cathedral attracted my attention. Someone must be up and about after all, thought I, and in the Rue Martel at that. I arched my hands over my eyes and gazed fixedly for a moment in the direction of Michel Gulpe's *boutique de tabac*. I caught the flash again; this

time it was more distinct, com ing direct from where I had located the shop.

Then a sudden inspiration seized me. I would satisfy my curiosity as to whence that light came. After equipping myself with high boots, great coat, and drooping hat, I snuffed my candle and began a perilous descent. Down the steep, nar row stairs that led directly by Madame Valjean's room, I felt my way, holding my breath the while, lest even that should in tensify the frightful groan that each step uttered as my foot

pressed against it. I expected at any instant to be brought to a standstill by Madame's challenge. I arrived at the bottom in safety, however, and heaved a sigh of relief as the great door closed behind me, leaving me free in the open air. But I am quite sure that I saw Madame's white night cap pressed against the window pane until I reached the foot of the Rue Royale.

It was no easy task finding the Rue Martel, with the wind and the rain blending their forces to bring me to grief,

the wind lashing me and the rain cutting my face; but I pushed bravely ahead and at last found myself in front of Michel Gulpe's *boutique de tabac*. A thin streak of light leaked through a crack of the door that led from the front shop to the room in the rear. In that room was the light that had caught my eye from the top of the Rue Royale.

I did not inform Michel immediately of my presence. That would have been a thoughtless move, in truth. I would first reconnoitre, and

then judge as to the feasibility of approaching or withdrawing. By the side of the *boutique de tabac*, and leading through to the Rue du Nord, was a nar row, tortuous little alley, that was seldom, if ever, used except by the small boys of the village, to whose minds the advantages of a short-cut were many. I knew, from certain guarded re marks that I had by chance overheard, that a window opened direct upon this alley from Michel Gulpe's establish ment. I also knew that there was no side window in the

front shop. In all probability, therefore, the window above referred to must lead from the room in the rear of the shop.

It was with the greatest difficulty that I squeezed myself through this narrow passage-way and reached the window. The two bulging, wooden buildings between which I stood, were so closely pressed together as to afford me an exceedingly comfortable shelter from the swirling, blustering storm. The base of the window was somewhat above my head, but as I groped around in the dark

ness my foot kicked against something hard that proved to be a large block of stone placed almost directly in front of the window. I suspect that Jean and Sulpice knew more about the history of that stone than anyone else in the village. Luckily, the curtains were not drawn closely together and an opening, sufficiently wide for me to see all that was going on within the room, was left.

I stood breathless for a moment, fascinated by what my eyes beheld. It seemed as though I had been suddenly

transported to the gloomy cell of Doctor Faustus, which I had once seen portrayed in an etching — by Rembrandt, I believe. The room was somewhat smaller than the front shop, and was dimly lighted by a fantastically-wrought metal lamp, that hung on a chain suspended from the ceiling. The half-starved tongue of flame sputtered incessantly as if to glean more nourishment from its barren surroundings, and cast a dismal ray over the sanctum. On a shelf near the door rested a row of books

alike only in their shabby attire. In the centre of the room, beneath the metal hanging lamp, stood a curiously-carved table supported by monstrous legs and paws curtailed of their fair proportions, on which was massed, in frightful disarray, a strange collection of hideous objects—compasses, alembics, vials of all kinds and sizes, spheres, manuscripts, death's heads and hieroglyphic parch ments. Along the bellied walls were suspended a weird assort ment of mounted animal skel etons, and in a further corner,

with grinning skull, hung the framework of a human being. And over all this sepulchral litter there lay, in fitting grace, a grotesquely fringed winding sheet of dust and cobwebs.

And yet the sanctum was not devoid of life. A man sat in an armchair bending over the table. It was Michel Gulpe. His face was bent so low that I could not discern the features, but I easily recog nized the little black cap and the massive shoulders of the man. In his hand was a pestle with which he was grinding

to a powder some substance contained in the mortar that stood on the table before him. As I stared at him with be wildered eyes, he raised his head. He was facing the light and the rays of the dancing flame cast an unnatural glow over his strangely cadaverous countenance. He continued his work with the pestle all the while his gaze roamed rest lessly around his retreat. From time to time he would return his piercing black eyes to the substance in the mortar. I could even see his hand

tremble when he raised his pestle in order to judge of the progress of his labor. Once he arose, crossed the room, and seated himself in a despairing attitude on a couch that stood beneath the shelf of rusty books. He passed his hand across his brow, as if to cast aside some shadow of a doubt that impeded the continuance of his task. But he was on his feet again in an instant, and returning to the table emptied the contents of a small vial into the mortar and began working his mixture with re newed energy.

Stood straining his eyes, with
wild and fascinated gaze.—Page 63.

Finally he placed a small amount of the compound in a long glass tube, lighted a candle that stood before him, and placed the end of the tube in its flame. The next instant he let fall the tube to the floor, dropped his clenched fists on the table, and stood straining his eyes, with wild and fasci nated gaze, at something that seemed to be rising before his face. At first I could not perceive what this something was. But the almost maniacal expression of ecstacy that over spread Michel's countenance

was so hypnotic in its intensity that I felt my head drawn nearer the pane and my eyes nearly straining from their sockets in a strenuous attempt to fathom the mystery. At last I could distinguish the some thing on which his gaze was riveted. A faint curl of vapor had floated forth from the heated contents of the tube and was ascending slowly and gracefully towards the ceiling. His eyes followed this softly undulating wreath as the eyes of a serpent follow a frog, or the eyes of a cat, a bird.

Higher, higher rose the vapory curl, wilder, wilder grew Michel's eyes. Then, as the edge of the ring touched the ceiling and the wreath of vapor slowly dissolved itself into a white, fluttering cloud against the smoky wall, Michel sud denly raised his hands from the table, and grasped a small metal box that lay beside the mortar. Scarcely had his hand touched the box when there was a fright ful rattling of stones in the alley, a shuffling of feet, a stumble, a sudden terrific howl, and I went sprawling at full

length upon the cold, soggy earth. Then all was still save the clattering of wooden sabots down the Rue Martel, and a shrill, tremulous voice which I immediately recognized as belonging to Sulpice Taubert, the baker's boy.

"Run, Jean, run like the devil!" he yelled. "Old Gulpe's loose again and has changed into a black elephant!"

I was not particularly delighted with my unexpected spill, nor was I at all flattered at being labeled a black elephant; but when I realized

that it was Sulpice Taubert who had upset me, and not one of Michel Gulpe's red devils, I quickly recovered from my sudden dismay and chuckled lustily at the disastrous and ignominious finale that had come to the midnight conspiracy of the two young rascals.

As I sought to regain my feet the curtains above my head were cast wide apart and the window was thrown open with a crash.

"Aha! you young scoundrels!" roared the deep voice of

Michel Gulpe, "I've a mind to change you all into chickens and wring your necks!"

"Mercy, Monseigneur, mercy!" cried I, groping around in the dark for my hat that had disappeared in the collision.

"You there, monsieur!" he exclaimed, thrusting his body half-way through the window in his astonishment. "I swear by the belly of the Pope I thought it was some of those young devils of the village."

"Not a young devil," I

replied, guiltily, "but a full grown devil."

"And what are you doing here at this time of night, pray?" he asked.

"I — I was merely passing by your shop, monsieur," I replied, stammering in my embarrasment, "when I heard those little rascals prowling around your window, and in attempting to drive them away I — I slipped and fell."

A wild gust of wind swooped through the little alley, and cast a bucketful of raindrops in Michel Gulpe's face. Hastily

withdrawing his gaunt figure within the window, he ex claimed:

"This is no night for a gentleman to be out of doors. Come inside and get dry. Besides, I want to have a talk with you."

With that he slammed to the window, and went through the shop to open the door for me. Mechanically I picked my way out of the alley and entered the little *boutique de tabac*. I was undecided as to whether I should brazen the affair out or cast myself at

his feet and cry, '*Peccavi, domine, peccavi!*'

"Let us enter the rear room," said he, leading the way. "It's warmer there and the wind and rain do not beat so drearily against the window."

We entered the room — the one where I had witnessed such an unusual spectacle but a few moments before. At Michel's bidding I removed my heavy outer clothes, and seated myself on a long, low divan that rested in front of the window through which I had peered. Not a word did I utter all this while.

The emotions that held me slave were of the kind that come in dreams.

"Drink," said he, filling a glass from a small bottle which he had taken from a shelf, and passing it to me.

"This," thought I, "is Michel Gulpe's revenge. I am about to be changed into a chicken and have my neck wrung." But I drank, nevertheless, and as the fiery liquor flowed down my throat, and coursed through my shivering body, and I felt no pin-feathers sprouting upon my person, I knew that my

worst fears were not to be realized.

"My friend," said Michel, seating himself in a chair before the table where he had been working, "I wish to have a serious talk with you."

"But, Monsieur Gulpe," I exclaimed earnestly, "I assure you on my honor that I had no evil intentions in prowling around your house."

"Bah!" said he, smiling, "It's not about that that I wish to speak. It's about an entirely different matter. I'm going to make a confidante of you. You

are curious to know all about me and my work — eh, monsieur?"

"Yes," I replied, exceedingly abashed at the suddenness of the question.

"*Eh bien*," said he, puffing leisurely at his long clay pipe, "I'm going to tell you then."

I pinched myself to see if I was really awake.

"First of all," said he, trans fixing me with his piercing black eyes, "what I am about to tell you must be kept in strict secrecy — eh?"

"In strict secrecy," said I,

regarding with curious eyes the strange play of his features under the flickering rays of the metal lamp.

"For," continued he, without removing his eyes from me, "I'm not as yet ready to show the brainless fools of this village that I am not quite the crazy old Michel they take me for."

"I'll never mention a word about to-night," said I, emphat ically, meaning what I said, for I had reasons of my own for remaining mute.

"I believe what you say monsieur," said he, "for I know

you to be a man of honor. *Eh bien!* In the first place you must know that only now am I on the point of accomplishing that for which I have been striving for more than thirty years — for longer than you have lived, monsieur. Every night in all that time have I worked in this little shop, trying to solve the one great mystery of life, and every night has seen me in exultation or in despair. At times it would seem as though my success were certain; then again my task would seem hopeless, and the vast, uncertain

future would deepen its hue before my straining eyes. But at last, monsieur, have I made a discovery that will change all life. The powder which you see in that mortar is to be mixed with certain liquids, and the fumes arising from the resulting mixture will revolution ize the world of thought and science.

"In what way, you ask? My investigations have taught me many things, monsieur. I have learned that the human being possesses an outer and an inner soul, or an imperishable

and a perishable soul. The im perishable soul is of divine origin, and is transmigratory, being des tined to fulfil a prolonged and varied cycle of existence before it reunites with the divine nature whence it came. This outer soul is immaterial, and is dis tinct from the body. The inner or perishable soul is also imma terial, but is inseparably united with the body. It consists of the three constituents, Intellect, Emotion and Will. When the body dies this inner soul dies with it, and both return to the dust of the earth. The outer

soul, however, enters space where it remains until rehabili tated in a new and animate form When it enters its new abode it is absolutely devoid of the men tal energy included in the inner soul. This energy is cultivated during the progress of develop ment in the new form.

" Now, monsieur, all the per plexities of science, religion and life are involved in the great un certainty that everywhere pre vails concerning the transmigra tion of the soul. I knew that to solve the mystery of myster ies I must first prove the truth

of metempsychosis. I spent years of the most strenuous la bor in that task. I delved into every branch of learning, I ex hausted the knowledge of others, I manipulated in every conceiv able way the practical and the theoretical. And all to what purpose ?

"I learned that the Intellect, or thinking portion of our men tal constitution, was entirely sep arate from the emotional or en ergetic portions. I also learned that the soul, although imma terial, is nevertheless susceptible to impressions. And now, mon

sieur, the result of all my labors comes into play, for I, Michel Gulpe, tobacconist of the Rue Martel, and considered crazy by my neighbors, all of whom are my enemies, have discovered a mix ture which, when injected into the body, will separate the Intel lect from the inner soul, and im press it indelibly upon the outer soul. Thus, when the body dies, the outer soul pours into space and is ready to enter into a new body, *being fully endowed with the power to remember, com pare and reason.* Do you catch the full significance of what I

say, monsieur? Do you realize that I have deduced from chaos the one great hitherto unex plained problem of life? Some day, monsieur, the world will proclaim me the greatest savant of all times. And what is more, I have this very night dis covered the means whereby the Will may also be impressed upon the outer soul, thus enabling the intellectual soul to direct its course in any way whatsoever. I have long held the secret of impressing the Intellect upon the outer soul, but the manipu lation of the Will has ever

seemed an impossible task. But tonight, just before you came, monsieur, a divine spark illum ined my brain, and showed to me a clear and simple solution of the problem. Ah! but I am happy; so happy! Can you con ceive of the possibilities arising from my discovery, monsieur?"

"But," said I, trying to un ravel the meaning of all that he had said, "I don't see that you have proved your fundamental idea --- the transmigration of the soul. You have no proof at all in that regard."

"No proof!" cried he excited

ly, his black eyes glittering in the intensity of his enthusiasm, "Why, I have the proof of it in the very history of my own life."

"And what may that proof be?" I asked.

"It is a long — a very long — story," he said.

"Never mind that," I ex claimed with interest. "I've got the whole night to listen."

Without more ado Michel Gulpe arose from his chair, squatted before me on the floor in true oriental fashion, and pro ceeded to relate the following most extraordinary tale.

PART FOUR.

Part Four.

OU have lived here with us, monsieur, for only about a month, and yet you already know what the people think and say not only of me but of everyone else who happens by the most trivial chance to incur their disfavor. Bah! they are a herd of asses — ignorant, stubborn and super

stitious. They think only of eating and drinking and gossiping. They vilify and besmirch everyone; the better the man, the thicker the drivel. Even monsieur l'Abbé Philandre comes in for his share of the scandal that pursues the goats and the sheep alike. Maybe I am crazy, as they say; but you can judge for yourself, monsieur, when you have heard my story, which is certainly strange but nevertheless true.

You will be surprised, my friend, when I tell you that I am a worshipper of the ineffable

Brahma, who is the universal spirit. A profound study of this mystic but beautiful religion has convinced me of the truth of the doctrine of the transmigra tion of the soul. I have lived and you have lived many lives before. You can remember this life alone. I, however, can remember three distinct lives be fore this.

The first of these was the best, because it was then that an intense love for Brahma filled my whole being. I was the only son of an officer in the French army. He was a noble man and

intelligent, a man much esteemed by the people, a man whose opinion was held as conclusive and whose word was law. He had travelled much in his youth and had acquired a wide ac quaintance with the world, so wide that whenever there were military affairs of importance to be conducted on foreign shores my father was always the man to whom they were entrusted. It thus happened that he was often sent on long journeys and, as my mother had died shortly after I was born, he not infre quently took me with him as a

companion, rather than leave me alone in the hands of a rigor ous pedagogue.

One of these journeys carried my father to India, and I accom panied him. We landed at Cal cutta and at once travelled in land to Nangpore. There we settled down for several months, my father devoting himself to his diplomatic affairs, and I de voting myself to roving about the town and through the neigh boring country, getting acquaint ed with the people and observ ing their many peculiar customs.

During one of my lonely ex

cursions to the outskirts of the town I passed a bungalow of modest proportions, on the low, shaded verandah of which sat a man whose unusual, distin guished air attracted my boyish curiosity at once. He was tall, thin, of a deep olive color, and had an abundance of heavy black hair that fell to his shoulders. But most remarkable of all were his black eyes that seemed to pen etrate one's innermost soul.

We immediately exchanged courtesies, as was customary in that country, and I, at his invi tation, seated myself on a low

stool near the door-way. I soon found, to my keen delight, that he could speak excellent French, and in a very short time we be came the best of friends. Imam, for that was the name by which he asked me to address him — Imam Nath being his full name —soon proved himself a most interesting conversationalist. He seemed to divine immediately the subjects that interested me most, for he related to me many of his strange and thrilling adven tures in the wilds and jungles of India. It was long after sun set when I left him and returned

to the town; but before we part ed he made me promise to visit him again the next day.

The next day, and every suc ceeding day until I left Nang pore, found me in the company of my good friend Imam Nath. He was a man of the most pro found learning, and we soon be came involved in a series of doc trinal and philosophical discus sions that were not only instruc tive, but even persuasive to me; for, though a boy, I was almost as subtle a thinker as I am now. I learned that he was a faithful disciple of that unique branch of

the Brahmin faith taught only at Pushkara in Râjputana, of which district he was a native. He took it upon himself to escort me into the mysterious and fas cinating depths of that faith. At first I was incredulous. I thought he was merely reciting for me some of the fairy tales of his country. But soon I became aware that he was thoroughly in earnest, and that there was in disputable truth in what he said. He read to me many passages from the divine writings of Manu, and I can remember even now how I sat spellbound one

evening in front of his house, while he told me of the origin of Brahma, and the way in which he created heaven and earth.

"Manu tells," said he, "how this universe was enveloped in impenetrable darkness, entirely sunk, as it were, in sleep. Then the omnipotent self-existent Lord, indiscernible, caused this universe with the five elements to become discernible. He who is beyond the cognizance of the senses, himself shone forth. He, desiring, seeking to produce va rious creatures from his own

body, first created the waters, and deposited in them a seed. This became a golden egg, re splendent as the sun, from which he himself was born as Brahmā, the progenitor of all the worlds. Being formed by that First Cause, indiscernible, eternal, which is both existent and non-existent, that male is known in the world as Brahmā. That Lord having continued a year in the egg, divided it into two parts by his mere thought. With these two shells he formed the heavens and the earth; and in the middle he placed the sky,

the eight regions, and the eter nal abode of the waters."

As I sat there, motionless and speechless, drinking in the words of wisdom as they flowed from the mouth of Imam, the flaming sun sank low on the far-off western hills, the clouds of night gathered loweringly in the wooded east, the swift-rising breath of darkness whispered mournfully through the neigh boring trees, and the birds and beasts of the wood sought their peaceful rest. And as Imam continued and told me further of the truths and mysteries of

the East, the tears came to my eyes and my soul was filled with happiness, for I knew that I had found that certainty for which men seek.

I told Imam of my sudden conviction and he, gazing tender ly on me with his lustrous eyes, and raising his hands towards heaven, called down the blessing of the Universal Spirit upon my head. Then he bade me enter his bungalow where, after many mysterious signs and mutterings, he presented me with a small vial containing a peculiar, green ish liquid, saying:

"This, my son, is the most extraordinary fluid known to mortal man, a fluid for which the wise men of all times have sought, a fluid which is disclosed to but two living souls in the whole wide world, one an old priestess of Pushkara, who received the receipt from the Universal Spirit itself, the other myself. Take this vial, my son, and when thou feelest the cold hand of Death approaching thy throat, press it to thy lips and swallow the wine contained therein. It will make thee remember in thy new life all that has occurred in thy past lives.

Bless thee, my son, bless thee."

And I, with the breath of night whispering softly to me through the high trees along the way, trudged back to the town over the rough, dark road — for night had fallen over the country in all its intensity — reflecting on the wonderful things that I had heard, and the beautiful light that had entered my soul.

In the course of time my father and I returned to France where I, having an ample income left me by my mother, devoted most of my time to my studies

and to the furtherance of my philosophical investigations. I worked hard, read many books, and listened daily to the teach ings of the learned men of Paris. To me the theory of transmigra tion became a most fascinating subject for study and individual research, and from early morn ing till late at night I delved into the discoveries of the past and sought to probe the myster ies of the present. My brain became filled with all that was known on the subject of Me tempsychosis, and I even succeed ed in solving satisfactorily to

myself many problems that had hitherto lain in darkness.

With all my close application to work, however, I still had time and sense enough left at my disposal to — to fall in love. It seems foolish indeed, mon sieur, for a man of learning to do such a rash thing — but I humbly confess that I fell in love, and heels over head at that. She was a most divine creature to look upon and to know, and zealously as I had pursued my various studies, just so zealously did I pursue the art of gallan try. And I assure you that there

were intricacies in the latter that were even more difficult to un ravel than were some in the former. But I persevered — I was never given to yielding when once I undertook to accomplish an object, — and in the course of a few months she succumbed to my importunities. We were married shortly afterwards, and entered upon our career of bliss with all the fervor of youth.

The strange part of my story is yet to come, monsieur. We had not been married a month when I fell ill and died. No sooner had I felt the grip of

death upon my throat, however, than I swallowed the contents of the vial which my good friend Imam Nath had given me. Ah! with what keen re gret did I gaze upon my beauti ful wife as she stood weeping by my bedside, and reflect upon the perversity of a fate that could separate such congenial souls. How I deplored the fact that I must relinquish this life, the joys of which I had just begun to taste. But I died, monsieur, and oblivion settled upon me. I knew noth ing, I felt nothing, I was noth

ing. It was as if I had entered into a black, subterranean tun nel, leaving the last rays of light and life far in the rear.

How long I remained in this state, in this Lethean tunnel, I know not. But at last a sud den ray of light appeared and I evolved again into light and life. I opened my eyes and gazed curiously upwards. I was lying on my back in a large, hot room, with a superabun dance of cloths wrapped about my perspiring body. A pleasant appearing woman with a white cap and apron stood by my

side gazing tenderly upon me. As I opened my eyes, she patted my cheek and kissed me in the mouth. I became exceedingly angry at her familiarity and attempted to remonstrate with her. But I found to my utter dismay that I could not speak a word, only a shrill, foolish squawk issuing from my lips. So frightened was I that I tried to rub my head and see if it was there. My arm was bun gling and awkward, but I man aged to flounder it around so as to touch my hand to my hair. Imagine my stupefaction, mon

sieur, to discover that I had no hair. I bit my lips in my perplexity, but I suffered no pain for I discovered also that I had no teeth. Then I began to thresh and kick, but my movements were like those of a lobster out of its element, stiff, clumsy, and unavailing.

The woman in white, seeing my struggles, patted me again on the cheek, saying softly:

"Oh! the little sweetheart!"

Little sweetheart! What the devil could she mean? I thought hard and fast for a moment, and then of a sudden

the whole thing came across my brain like a flash. I had been born again and my soul, in its transmigration, had car ried impressed upon it my Intel lect. The prescription of my good friend, Imam, was doing its work. But, sad to relate, he had either forgotten all about the Will, or had been un able to prescribe for it. Would that I had known all this before. I now fully realized the terrible predicament in which I was—born again with a perfectly developed intellect

and the impotent body of an infant.

I wondered whether I was a boy or a girl. I was begin ning to fall a sacrifice to this new horror, when the woman in white spoke again :

" What a bright little fellow he is."

Thank heavens! In this re gard at least my fears were allayed.

I lay awake all that night giving much careful considera tion to the predicament which had fallen to my lot. I in wardly cursed the hour when

first I had yielded to the temp tation of knowing more than is allotted the ordinary man to know. Not for a moment, however, did I think of casting the blame upon Imam Nath, for his intentions had been of the best. I had only myself to blame, and I viewed my case with jaundiced eyes.

My previous life floated back before me, but only one object stood forth to harass my sore spirit. That object was the one that I adored above all others—my wife. I wondered where she was now, and

whether she was alive. It might have been a hundred years before that I had lived my first life, for all I knew. It appalled me when I thought that I must pass through the several stages of a new life, while she, my beautiful wife, was either lying cold in death or was again in the world, her peerless soul enshrined in a new body. Oh that she had pos sessed a flask of eternal damna tion such as Imam Nath had presented to me, for then we could both spend our days in seeking each other. Fain would

I have shared with her the con tents of the vial before I had greedily gulped them down at the hour of my death. But it was too late now, and as I lay on my back in the darkness, tears of sorrow rolled over my face and dropped on the pillow where I lay.

Suddenly a light was brought into the room and placed on a table not far from my bed. I again heard the voice of the woman in white, but this time she was not addressing me, but a third person who seemed to be in the room. For a

moment I wondered who it might be, then it dawned upon my whirling brain that it must be my mother. I had forgotten until then that of necessity I must have a new mother. I was wondering what sort of creature she might be. I was always excessively fastidious about women, and I was anxious to know what sort of mother I had drawn.

"How is madame feeling?" asked the woman in white.

The voice that gave answer sent a wicked chill of despair tearing through my feeble

body, for it belonged to Madame Bonsard, a shrewish individual who inhabited the apartments beneath those occu pied by my wife and myself— in my first life. How my little heart flopped when I realized that she, my beautiful wife, was in all probability within a very short distance from me at that very moment! I could almost see her as she sat before the long, oval mirror in our room combing her luxuriant hair, which cast a delightful fra grance to my amorous nostrils. I could almost see the soft,

white gown that I like so well, and with which she adorned her graceful figure every morning to please my fancy.

And I, a helpless infant, the son of a woman whom I detested above all other women, lay there on my back, wallowing in the reek of my own despair. Gladly would I have been born to any other woman on the face of the earth, than to Madame Bonsard. She was a termagant of the deepest dye, and her peppery temper had many times sacrificed me during

my first life. She strenuously objected to my smoking, claiming that the clouds of tobacco smoke which flowed down into her apartments interfered with her breathing. I wondered if she would object to my smoking now. A fragrant pipe in my present mood would have been a luxury, indeed!

Then again my new mother had been an inveterate gossip-monger. My wife and I could not exchange an idea without the whole neighborhood hearing about it. Whatever imperfection my mother might have

with her breathing apparatus was more than offset by the keenness of her hearing appara tus. She was also possessed of an incurable mania for borrow ing, and had already acquired many of our household belong ings before I died. Even now, as I let my eyes roam round the chamber in the faint glim mer of dawn, I saw on the mantel a bronze shaving-mug that my wife had given me before we were married. Mon sieur Bonsard had, indeed, reaped some benefit from my early demise. But it was all in

the family now, so what did it matter?

Monsieur Bonsard — my father! I had not thought of this before, but it must be so, for Madame Bonsard was ever a faithful wife, if nothing more. Poor, old Monsieur Bonsard! How I had pitied him when I was in my first life! Fat, lazy and parasitical, he always re tained about his person the greasy odor of a penny bake shop. Aside from pity, I never acquired any affection for him — my new father — because he was continually borrowing my

tobacco and coming up into our apartments to smoke it, in order to escape the sharp tongue of his spouse. He hated her, she hated him, and I detested them both.

Thus began my second life. During the days that followed I had intense longings to see again the partner of my previous joys and sorrows. Every time that I heard the sound of footsteps overhead my heart throbbed with excitement. But I was kept in strict seclusion for sev eral days, seeing only the woman in white and Madame, my

mother. Monsieur, my father, must have been camping out in the cellar for he never put in an appearance during all of my mother's illness. It was doubt less a boon to him. The two women petted me and covered me with kisses, but it was no pleasure to me, I can assure you. I became nervous and fretful, and even refused to partake of the nourishment that was offered me. I was always a modest youth, and besides I did not care for the flavor of Madame Bonsard's milk.

One day, as I lay on my back

watching the festive flies as they gamboled o'er the ceiling, and patiently awaiting whatever new horror that might be sprung upon me, the door to my room opened softly and I heard the sweet rustle of *lingerie* that was always music to my ear. Almost imme diately I felt a soft, warm hand placed against my cheek, and looking to one side I saw, stand ing before me in all the magnifi cence of her youthful beauty, my wife. She looked quite the same as she had on the day that I died and, had it not been for the sombre black in which she

She looked quite the same as she had on the day that I died.—Page 122.

was clothed, I could easily have imagined that she had just re turned from a shopping tour in the city, and was about to order Nannette to prepare our dinner. Ah, what a beautiful creature she was! I gazed at her for a moment with devouring eyes and then, unable to contain my self longer, I stretched out my little arms for her to come to my heart.

She looked me over curiously for an instant with her lustrous, brown eyes.

"Oh, what a clever little fel

low!" she said at last, chucking me under the chin.

I, her own husband, a clever little fellow! It was too, too much for my tender, loving heart, and I burst into tears hoping thereby to strengthen my cause. But the mature emotion that I had expected and which is so effective, did not arrive, and instead I emitted a series of shrieks and squawks that come only from an ugly infant. I found that I had absolutely no command over my lachrymal glands or my vocal chords, and so exasperated did I become at

the puerility of my grief, that I began to kick and writhe in agony. My wife patted me again on the cheek, but that served only to increase my wrath, and I strove with all my power to burst a blood vessel, so as to free myself from this horrible nightmare. But I must have been a sturdy youngster, for I was still alive after the woman in white had taken my wife from the room.

That night and all the follow ing day I refused nourishment from Madame Bonsard. My heart was in a tumult of con

flicting emotions, and at times it seemed as though I should go insane as I reflected on how my wife had chucked me under the chin and called me a clever little fellow.

I realized that I had driven my wife from my side by my sudden outburst of passion. At first I was glad that she had gone, and tried to console my self with the thought that she was not deserving of any honest affection. But soon, after I had cooled off somewhat, I again found myself listening intently for the sound of footfalls in the

apartments above. At last my quick ears caught the tread of feet; but of a sudden my heart beat double time as I realized that the footsteps I heard were not those of my wife. They were heavy and slow. There was a man in my wife's room. A great wave of jealousy suffused my soul, and piled additional weights upon my already un bearable grief. Oh, woman, woman, what will you not do! Like the pale-faced poet I longed for some Utopia where women are not devils till they die.

Who could this male pedes trian be? Neither I nor my wife had brothers, her father was dead, while mine was always too occupied with affairs of state to squander his time in a lady's boudoir—especially in that of his daughter-in-law. Could it be that my wife was unfaithful to me? It certainly seemed out of accord with her nature, but then, what could a man expect of a wife who chucked him under the chin and called him a clever little fellow?

I began to grow hysterical as I thought of all these possibili

ties and, try as they might, neither the woman in white nor Madame Bonsard could soothe my harassed soul. Finally I became so unmanageable in my efforts to throw off this odious second life that my mother grew exceedingly alarmed, and ordered the woman in white to send for a physician. She re turned almost immediately with monsieur le docteur Bache and, oh, monsieur, the sorrow of it all! — accompanying him was — my wife. His, then, were the footsteps that I had heard in the apartments above. Bache, a

fine-looking young physician, had lived in rooms above the apartments occupied by my wife and myself in my first life. He had seemed to be a very decent fellow, and I had never sus pected him of plotting against my happiness. But now I saw through it all in an instant. I suddenly remembered how often he had dropped into our rooms to pass an evening with my wife and myself and, as those days came back more clearly before my eyes, I could even recollect certain little side-glances that he had given her when he thought

I was not looking. I realized now that this had meant more than ordinary friendship, and that my early demise had served only to bring about an earlier fulfillment of his hellish schemes. Oh, the wretch!

He came over to where I lay and placed his hand on my fore head. I had a sudden desire to bite a big piece out of him, but I remembered that I was tooth less.

"Is the little fellow very ill, dear?" asked my wife, placing her hand lovingly on the young doctor's arm.

"Not very, sweetheart," he replied, patting her fondly on the waist. "The little brat is only ugly. I fancy I can pull him through all right."

Little fellow! Dear! Sweet heart! Brat! This was all too much for me. I gave one last struggle, uttered a horrible squawk, struck forth for that devil of a doctor with all my strength, felt something sud denly burst within my head and —died a second time.

A second time, monsieur, I entered that tunnel of night perpetual, and a second time I

rolled forth into the sweet glow of life. Sweet glow, did I say? Nay, nay, anything but sweet to me. Fain would I have remained undisturbed in that chaotic abyss of nothingness for all time. Life held no further charms for my wearied soul, and I shuddered as I thought of what horrors might be lying in wait for me.

My first recollection of this third life was a most violent rocking sensation. Then my ears became filled with a terrible creaking and roaring, and I felt myself swaying rudely to

and fro in the darkness that was enveloping me. I wondered in what sort of nest I had chanced to alight this time. Mayhap I was a pretty little bird, nestling in the swaying boughs of a lofty tree. I hoped that, if such were the case, the trunk of the tree was sufficiently staunch, and my nest was sufficiently well attached, for I was not especially desirous at that moment of exploring the un known depths that might lie beneath me. Or could it be that I was in a cradle at the mercy of another woman in

white? This, however, would not account for the frightful hullabaloo that was going on all around me. I began to feel queer in my stomach, and won dered what I could have eaten for my dinner that should have so disagreed with me. 'With me,' I repeated to myself. 'Who am I? What am I? Where am I?' I was trying to the best of my ability to unravel the mystery that surrounded me, when a fearful and unexpected lurch almost turned me inside out, and at the same time the creaking and the roaring doubled their intensity

Suddenly I heard a feeble cry not far from where I lay. I listened eagerly and heard it again. It was the voice of a human being. The cry was repeated several times, and was unmistakably that of a woman. Then a moment later I heard, amidst all the raging and roaring of whatever was going on about me, another cry, this time that of a man. What language these people spoke or what they were saying I could not distinguish for the deafening noise round about me. Of a sudden, however, there flashed up before

my eyes a light that, from its unexpectedness, nearly blinded me. I winked and blinked for a minute before I could calm my optic nerves sufficient to obtain a clue as to my surroundings.

I perceived that I was in a small, cell-like chamber with white rafters extending over my head. I looked long and hard for any sign of the rich hang ings and tapestries and works of art that it had ever been my lot to enjoy. But not a trace of anything of the sort met my eyes. 'It must be poor com

pany I have come into this time,' thought I. I tried to roll over on my side so as to see more of the cell and to scrutin ize my new companions. But I discovered to my horror that I was held down by a strap and could not move. And this with the cell rolling round like a ball on a floor! It was more than my nerves could stand, and I began to yell at the top of my lungs.

At that, the woman spoke:

"Jean, dear, won't you please try to do something for that child."

And, lo and behold, the voice was that of my wife in my first life! I began to shriek anew.

"Shut up, you little brat," growled the voice of the man.

And the voice was that of Monsieur le docteur Bache.

I heard it all. I saw it all. I understood it all. My wife and Monsieur le docteur Bache were now joined together in the holy bonds of matrimony and I, my wife's husband, was their legitimate offspring.

The blood of my ancestors coursed in raging torrents through my veins. I shuddered

at the ignominy of it all. To think that I, my wife's own husband, should also be her own child, and that Bache, the scoundrel, should have the audacity to call me "a little brat!" But then, was he not my wife's husband also, and my father? She had two husbands now, both were living, and one was her own child. Would that I had never known the woman! She was a badge of infamy, and had brought dishonor upon the fair name of our family. Still, if I were the son of Bache, was not my name Bache also? My

poor father! What would he have said could he have known the shameless pit into which I had fallen!

A tremor, more relentless than any that had preceded, shook the cell and everything in it.

"O, Jean, dear," cried my wife, "do you think the ship is going to sink?"

Ship! We were in a ship then, and at the mercy of a storm on the high seas. This accounted for all the terrible rushing and roaring that was deafening my poor ears. 'It

must be a bad storm, too,' I thought, from the way things were changing places in our cabin. A horrible thought then took possession of me. What if the ship should go down? How could I make any effort to save myself while I was thus bound down hard and fast in my berth? I struggled with all my strength to release myself, but I could make no headway against the infernal strap that encircled my abdomen. I felt that I was doomed in case any accident should occur. The thought made me frantic, and I

redoubled my yelling, hoping that some kind soul would have mercy on my helplessness and let me loose.

"Jean," said my wife, pleadingly, "won't you please quiet the baby?"

"I'll strangle it if it doesn't shut up," replied the brute.

"*Strangle me!* I should like to see you make an attempt, you devil!" thought I, trying to grit my gums.

The severity of the storm was increasing every minute, and the old ship reeled and ducked as though she were trying to

touch bottom. I could hear strange, unpleasant noises in the adjoining cabins, which sounded as if people had swallowed but tons and were trying to get them up again. The timbers creaked and groaned, and the ship throbbed from stem to stern as she was lifted out of the water by the gigantic waves. The shouts of the seamen who were rushing about overhead made me realize that this was no ordinary storm, and that there was trouble brewing. The cabins resounded with the cries of terrified men and women.

"Jean," said my wife to Monsieur le docteur, in a trembling voice, "I fear that something is going to happen."

"Let it happen," gulped Jean, in agony. "I don't care."

And it did happen. The next instant there came a terri fic crash, and the whole frame work of the ship seemed to be reft apart. I felt a sudden sink ing sensation, the lights became extinguished, my mouth was filled with salt water and then —I heard the sweet music of birds and bells and fountains, and saw beautiful green pastures

and lofty hills rising in the dim distance. But my dream of paradise was short-lived for almost immediately a huge, black mouth yawned before me, and I entered once more that Lethean tunnel which had twice before sheltered me from the horrors of life.

Needless to say, my friend, I came to life a fourth time. The buzz of voices filled my ears and, as I opened my eyes to the light of day, I saw several people standing round about me, amongst whom I immediately recognized a woman in white. I eagerly scanned her

countenance, but found, I know not whether with joy or sorrow, that it was not she who had attended me during my second life. I was really get ting so hardened to this sort of existence that I was thoroughly indifferent as to where I was born or who were my parents.

As I glanced over the faces of the other occupants of the room, however, I suddenly felt my heart throb fast, for there, not more than two feet from my side, stood the father of my first life, he whom I loved of all men, and with whom I had

taken that eventful journey to Nangpore in India. Neverthe less, I did not lift up my voice in agony this time, for I was becoming too well accustomed to surprises of this sort to lose control ot my passions. I merely wondered what my father was doing there, and whose little boy was I. I was not so sure that I was a boy; but I took it for granted that, inasmuch as I had been a boy three times, the good stork would not ignore my one pre rogative this fourth time.

My father came nearer to my

side and looked into my fac with his kindly eyes.

"A brave little fellow," said he, tenderly, smoothing back my bald pate, "with even the features of his poor, dead brother. We must name him after Michel, my dear. What think you of Michel Gulpe the Second?"

"A charming name," ex claimed a soft voice near me. "We will surely name him after your dear son, Pierre. I never knew your Michel but, being a son of his father, he must have been a delightful man."

"Thank you a thousand times, Lucille, darling," said my father, smiling. "And Michel the Second will possess an additional charm inasmuch as he is your son, too, my sweet."

So my own father was my father again! The rascal! He had gone and married this woman, Lucille without even asking my approbation. And I was the result. I rolled my head round as best I could, and surveyed with a critical eye the female by my side. A charming woman she was, indeed, being not more than three-and-

twenty, with gorgeous eyes and a shock of golden hair that would have driven any man to drink. She looked as though she might be an extremely agreeable and easy woman to get along with and furthermore she was my dear father's choice. So, after a few moments' reflec tion, I decided wisely to take things as they were, and rolled over on my side and went to sleep.

Well, Monsieur, there is not a great deal more to tell. I am now living the remnant of this fourth life feasting my mind

on memories of past lives and preparing my soul for future lives. One peculiarity of my existence has been that, as an infant, my intellect was perfectly developed in every respect. It retained all the wisdom that I had acquired in my first life, and much more valuable material that I acquired in my following lives, short as they were. On the contrary, however, I had no more control over my physical powers than has any other infant. It was not given me to manipulate my Will as I had manipulated my

Intellect, and it was this lack of power that resulted in all the horrors of my second and third lives. I have devoted the best part of my present life to the solving of this problem of the Will and as you have seen, monsieur, my discovery of to night will enable me to neutral ize the one defect that has been my curse. I feel that my days in this life are numbered, and that I have made my precious discovery none too soon. 'Ere long, when I feel that death is near, I shall make goodly use of the liquid that lies on yonder

table. It shall join the blood that courses my veins, and its effect will be a combination of Will and Intellect impressed up on my transmigratory soul in such way that I can direct this subject soul into whatever form or condition I desire.

Ah, my dear friend, what bliss will then be mine! Would that my good friend Imam Nath might know of my discovery, for I am sure it would save him from much pain and sorrow. You can never conceive of the humility, monsieur, that my physical impotence brought

upon me in my second and third lives, and likewise during the first years of my present life. I was obliged to creep along the floor, instead of striding like a man, which was no trivial wound to my pride, I can assure you. And many a time, when I was sucking away at a bottle of in sipid warm milk, I nearly died for the want of a hot roast and a bottle of rare old Burgundy. Nor could I utter a word by which I might express my wants. And often, when my father would take me up and begin trotting me on his knee, I would

shed tears at the indignity, and would strain my little throat in my attempts to tell him all about myself. But the words would not come, and I would writhe in agony at my inability to identify myself to my own father.

One day, however, after I had been exerting myself for an hour to get my vocal chords in proper working condition, a welcome sound suddenly burst forth from my throat, and I heard myself say "papa." I well remember how delighted my father and mother were at this first success

ful effort at speech. I gloated over my victory for days. From that moment I made excellent progress in the art of speech. I was soon able to say "mamma," and other words came to my tongue in rapid succession.

I was just on the point of joining simple words together in short sentences, when my mother fell suddenly ill and shortly after died. The grief that my father displayed was wholly from the heart, and it seemed as if he would never become reconciled to her untimely death. I, too, was quite

heart-broken over the bereave ment, for my mother was a lovely woman and I was really very much attached to her.

After the funeral my father, acting on the impulse of the moment, announced that he was about to undertake a journey into the East. I decided that I would go too, and was begin ning to grow enthusiastic at the prospect of an extended sojourn in India where I might meet my friend Imam Nath once more, when one day my father took me in a carriage, behind a spanking pair of horses, to the

outskirts of the city. I was en joying the ride hugely, and would have spurned the idea of returning home, had it not been that we drove up in front of a large, frowning house and stopped. My father descended from the carriage, gathered me up in his arms, and entered through the door, which had been opened by a tall disa greeable-looking personage with a quill stuck over his right ear. And then, before I hardly knew what was happening, I was en rolled in a big, dusty book as

an inmate of Monsieur de Dau phin's kindergarten.

I then realized for the first time that my father was going to leave me all alone in this forbidding place. As he stooped to kiss me good-bye, I set up a woeful wail, and tried to tell him who I was and why he should not leave me there. But all to no avail, for the words refused to form them selves in coherent shape, and I soon had the chagrin of seeing my father riding sorrowfully back toward the city.

I soon brought myself to

terms, however, and attended to my duties at Monsieur de Dau phin's kindergarten like a little man. I advanced rapidly to the head of my class, which was the lowest one of the school, and before long acquired a goodly supply of words and the ability to put them together in proper sequence. Slowly but surely I gained complete control of my vocal equipment. I was priding myself on the fact that when my dear father returned from his long journey I could tell him who I was. But woe is me! he never came back. I had been

at the school less than a year when I received word that the poor man had died of a fever in Calcutta.

I fell heir to an exceedingly comfortable estate, which I made no attempts to enjoy until I was fifteen years of age. Then I bade adieu to Monsieur de Dau phin and his sour-faced assistants, and set forth to see the world. Needless to say, I saw it, mon sieur. In less than five years I had squandered my last sou and found myself stranded in this town. I have never left it. By

dint of hard work I have accumu
lated all that you see about you.

And now, monsieur, you have
my story.

PART V.

PART FIVE

DAYLIGHT was beginning to streak the East and the rain that had all night long lashed the corners of the house in fitful gusts, was subsiding to a dismal drizzle. Michel Gulpe laid down his pipe, which had never once touched his lips during the night, rose to his feet, and gazed for some minutes through the side window

at the bare, desolate wall of the next building that excluded our view from the outside world. So interested had I been in the strange adventures of my friend the tobacconist, that I had be come oblivious of the flight of time, and a sudden chill of de spair swept through my veins as my thoughts went back to Mad ame Valjean. The one thought that consoled me was that if Madame had been at her window all this time awaiting my return, she ran a fair chance of taking a chill. And if she took a chill —which she ever did at the

least provocation — my day of reckoning would be indefinitely postponed.

"Well, friend Michel," said I, arising, and throwing my great coat over my shoulders, "I re gret that I have been the cause of your midnight vigil."

"Not at all, monsieur, not at all!" exclaimed Michel, walking out with me to the front of the shop, and opening the shutters. "Many a night have I remained at my post until it was time to prepare for the morning's trade, and the work has been a thou sand times more laborious, I can

assure you. The midnight oil that I have burned has had much to do with the evil name the superstitious villagers hereabout have given me. But then, my friend, what care we for their foolish prattle?"

Poor Michel Gulpe! Crazy as a loon, but as wise as the seven sages of old. A true par adox of a man, like whom the world contains none.

I left the little *boutique de tabac* and walked slowly down the Rue Martel. It seemed as though I had just emerged from a strange but fascinating dream, the shreds

of which still floated through my half-dazed brain. I had to accustom myself anew to the real life that surrounded me on all sides. The sudden slamming of a shutter, the heavy rumbling of an early-morning vegetable cart on its way to the market place, the shrill voice of a house wife arousing her sluggish family, all sounded harsh and unusual to my ears.

As I ascended the Rue Roy ale and approached my humble nest, I caught sight of Madame Valjean beating a rug in the rear garden. Her back was

turned towards me, and I succeeded in slipping within doors unobserved. I reached my room in safety; but not until I had barricaded the door did I feel secure from sudden onslaught.

The following afternoon I was sitting in the wine-room of the Cheval Blanc awaiting the arrival of the *diligence* from Poitiers. The day was oppressively warm and the open window by which I sat afforded the least possible trace of a breeze. As I glanced down the road I saw Jean Gaultier

and Sulpice Taubert coming up the hill, Jean scuffling along hands in pockets, Sulpice strug gling beneath a huge basket of fresh loaves. They halted for a moment in front of the Cheval Blanc, so near the win dow where I sat that I could overhear their conversation.

"It's very queer," said Jean kicking his metal toe caps against the stone step. "You don't imagine he has left town do you?"

"I don't know what to think," replied Sulpice, resting his basket on a worm-eaten

hitching post. "He has never gone away before. Félicien says there has been a light in that back room every night for forty years."

"I sneaked 'round there three times last night," continued Jean, "and tried to peek through the window. But the place was as black as the Devil's Hole."

"Maybe he ran off into the woods when he changed into an elephant the other night," sug gested Sulpice in a low voice. "You know, Jean, I always said

old Gulpe would disappear that way some night."

"Nonsense!" exclaimed Jean incredulously, "He wouldn't disappear that way. Félicien says he's going to change the whole village into an ant-hill before he goes away for good. At any rate we'll go there again to-night and see what's doing."

Then Sulpice grasped his basket again, and the two boys continued their way up the Rue Royale, jabbering as they went.

I was perplexed at what the boys had said. According to them, there had appeared no

light in Michel's shop the night before. This seemed exceedingly strange to me, for I knew that he very seldom wandered abroad, and never at night. After the arrival of the *diligence* I sought the Rue Martel, and approached the little *boutique de tabac*. Surely Michel must be there, for the shutters were open. But as I looked through the greasy window, I could not see him within the front shop. I tried the door, but found it locked. I knocked on the glass and rattled the latch, but no one responded. Could it be

that Michel had fallen asleep during the busiest part of the day? I went down the side alley and raised myself upon the stone that rested before the rear window. The room was dark, and at first I could see nothing. But as my eyes be came accustomed to the shadows I could make out the table and all that was upon it. It seemed very much the same as it had two nights before, with its instruments and vials and dishes and manuscripts. Michel could not be there, I was quite sure. I was on the point of returning

to the front of the shop when my gaze fell suddenly upon a long, dark object stretched out upon the low couch. Closer examination showed this object to be the body of a man, its face turned toward the wall.

"Michel!" I called, "Michel Gulpe, let me in!"

No answer.

I pounded upon the casement, but there was no movement from the figure within. In desperation I hastened to the front of the shop again and threw my body against the door. The lock could not

The ghastly white face of Michael Gulpe was staring at me.—Page 178.

have been very staunch, for it readily gave way and let me within the shop. I rushed through to the back room and grasped the shoulder of the long gaunt figure that lay stretched out before me.

"Michel!" cried I, shaking him gently. "Mich—"

I did not finish my sentence for at the first touch the limp body rolled over on its back, and the ghastly white face of Michel Gulpe was staring at me as can only the face of the dead.

Poor Michel! As he had

lived, so had he died—neglect ed and alone.

The room was undisturbed save for a small vial that lay on the floor by the side of the dead man. I knew only too well what that vial had con tained. 'Ere the world had learned of his greatness, Michel had tested his discovery—the discovery which was to make him the savant of all times.

After Monsieur le docteur Laurens had finished his exami nation of the body, I asked him for his verdict.

"Arsenic," said he, shaking

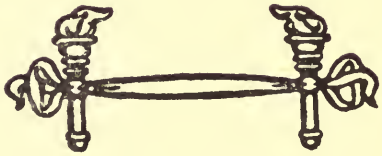
his head, "Too much arsenic, monsieur,"

A day later a mournful little procession consisting of a push-cart, a long black box, a man with a spade, and one solitary mourner started from a *boutique de tabac* on the Rue Bartel and moved slowly over the hill towards the city of the dead. As the one solitary mourner was sadly reflecting on the awful ness of death, two small boys passed by, and one was heard to whisper to the other:

"I say, Jean, didn't you just

see a black cat jump out of that box?"

THE END



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